THE DISCOVERY AND CONSERVATION OF THE HISTORY OF ARUBA

By Amy Silva
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WHO DISCOVERED ARUBA

Who discovered Aruba? If you look up the answer in the commonly available brochures about Aruba, you will find that the discovery is attributed to a Spanish conquistador by the name of Alonso de Ojeda, who on his second voyage in 1499 discovered Venezuela, Curacao, and Bonaire.

Some wannabe historians assure us that when Alonso de Ojeda discovered Cabo San Roman in the faithful year of 1499, because of his location at the time, by merely turning his head 180 degrees he would have been able to see the Hooiberg hill, located in the center of Aruba, hence the hypothetical claim to the discovery of Aruba in 1499.

At the end of the fifteenth century, a time when the seafaring powers of Portugal and Spain ventured into the unknown, sailors navigated uncharted seas and oceans, mapping and documenting the voyages of discovery along the way, and claiming the rights to virgin territories and riches in the name of the King and Holy Church.

Tangible proof of newly claimed colonies and wealth was required from the mariners by the financiers at home and sometimes a crucial factor in order to reap a bountiful reward in the motherland, and thus the conquistadors, ruthlessly methodical, recorded every sighting of land and visit ashore.

It is therefore fair to assume, that because Aruba is not mentioned specifically as having been sighted or visited, prior to the first recorded mention of the island of Aruba in a ship log in 1515, that there is no truth in the claim that Aruba was discovered in 1499.

To obtain irrefutable proof of the discovery of Aruba in 1499 the records of the Spanish Royal Council, and the Archdean of Sevilla, Juan Rodriguez de Fonseca, who commissioned the expeditions of Alonso de Ojeda, would have to be scoured, as well as the archives in Coro, Venezuela, the administrative district to which the "islas adyacentes a la Costa firme", as the islands of Curacao, Little Curacao, Bonaire, Little Bonaire and probably the Aves and Roques Islands as well, were called, belonged.

The question "who discovered Aruba" is academically irrelevant and historically incorrect, because at the time of the Spanish conquests Aruba was already inhabited by the Caiquetios, a clan of the Arowak Indians.

INDIAN ARUBA

The Precolumbian history of Aruba goes back to 2,500 B.C.

The Indian history of Aruba is subdivided into three periods:

The Preceramic period, 2,500 B.C. - 1,000 A.D.;

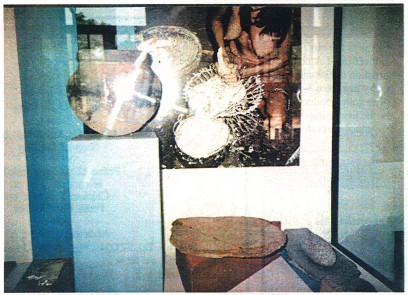
The Ceramic period, 1,000 A.D. - 1515 A.D., and;

The Indian-Historic period, 1515 - 1820 A.D.

THE PRECERAMIC PERIOD

Preceramic Indians lived in small family groups. Having no knowledge of agriculture they lived in the stone age, and exploited primarily marine resources such as fish, shell-fish, and sea turtles.

It must be noted that this time in Aruba, the island was covered by real forests, and to make a living and survive under the harsh conditions of the times with little natural resources available required special survival skills that have disappeared with the Indian culture.



An archeological survey conducted in 1990 identified 22 preceramic sites indicating the presence of Preceramic Indians.

Of these Canashito and Malmok, were used as burial grounds. The Malmok cemetery, near the north coast which is unique to the Caribbean.

Other preceramic sites are found at Arashi, Barcadera, Daimari, Manzania, Sero Geel, Sero Muskita, Soledad, Spaans Lagoen and Suplado.

THE CERAMIC PERIOD

Large villages of maize farmers existed during this period. Four large villages were founded by approximately 1,000 A.D. on the best agricultural grounds, locate at places we now know as Tanki Flip, Tanki Leendert, Santa Cruz and Savaneta.

These villages were located at the junctions or lower reaches of arroyos, creeks that carry water during the wet season, and enabled a production of crops to feed a relatively large number of people (75 per village).

The ceramic indians continued to use large amounts of fish, shell-fish and sea-turtles, and also produced pottery, consisting primarily of large vessels like cooking pots, burial urns, baking plates or griddles.

Fine pottery was also produced with thin walls, sometimes slipped and polished and often painted. This fine pottery often came with applied adornments in the shapes of legs, spouts, human faces, modeled animal heads etc. A high level of craftsmanship was achieved without the use of pottery wheels.

Shells and chalk were also worked into several types of artifacts. Disks of many sizes, many of them perforated have been found, used as beads, anklets, bracelets and body ornaments.

Many different types of stone were fashioned into axes, hammers and heavy tools. Bows, arrows and spears were made of wood and other perishable materials of which no traces have been found.

In the 1992 archeological survey 58 Ceramic period sites were identified. A few of these sites are located at Arashi, Ayo, Banki Jerome, Boca Cura Cas di Paloma, Cudawecha, Daimari, French Pass, Moko, Morgenster, Parkietenbos, Rincon, Rooi Kochi, Santa Martha, Seroe Muerte, Seroe Colorado, Simonslust, Tarabana, Urataca and Westpunt.

The inhabitants of this period in Aruba buried their dead in several ways.

One common way was by depositing the deceased in a squatting position in a large urn, with another urn upside down covering the top.

Generally the burials are grouped together.

The secondary urn burial is a special way of burying the dead.

The deceased is first buried in an urn.

After decomposition of the flesh the bones were collected and reburied in two small urns, one containing the skull and the other the remaining bones.

The various ways of burying the dead probably reflect the differences in status that existed within the village communities.

The ceramic period ends abruptly when the complete Indian population was abducted in 1515 to work on the Spanish estates in Hispaniola (the Dominican Republic).

THE INDIAN-HISTORIC PERIOD

Some Indians were allowed to return from Hispaniola, others came from the mainland, and were left much to their own devices during the ensuing centuries.

*The Indians herded cattle which was traded or sold in Curacao.

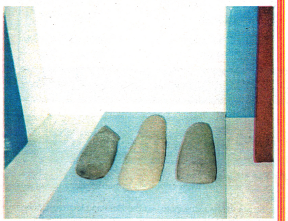
They lived in small villages in the north and north-east of Aruba, and succeeded in continuing on a smaller scale the culture of their ancestors.

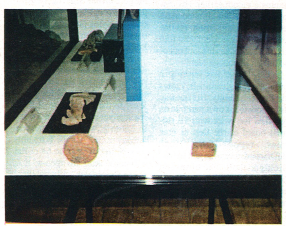
This Indian culture slowly declined when in 1750 the first Roman Catholic church was founded in the middle of small Indian communities.

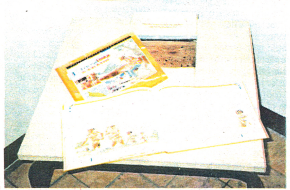
The last remains of the Indian language and burial customs are from approximately 1820.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF ARUBA

The Archaeological Museum Aruba was established in 1981 to exhibit the many artifacts from the prehistory found on the island.







Exquisitely ornamented ceramic pottery, fine polished stone and shell tools and an Indian burial dating 2000 B.C. are among the finds which have been made during excavations from the last years and which are displayed to acquaint the visitor with the ancient Aruban population.

The museum performs a double role: on the one hand it educates the local and international visitor on the subject of the Aruban prehistory.

The information supplied by the museum is obtained by carrying out archaeological research projects on the island.

The museum thus also has the role of a scientific research entity.

Excavation projects are carried out in cooperation with international institutions.

The results of these projects are published by the museum which currently has publications in English, Dutch and Papiamento for sale at the museum and local bookstores.

ARUBAN HISTORY TEXT BOOKS

The Archaeological Museum has set up an educational program for school groups where children are shown the various artifacts and told the interpretation thereof.

Short workshops exist to introduce to students the history and prehistory of Aruba.

This program led to the creation of a new and scientifically accurate account of Aruban history in a text book which contains pictures, illustrations and detailed information about the first inhabitants of Aruba, to be introduced to fourth and fifth grade elementary school students in the future.

This text book reflects the results of the joint efforts of a team of dedicated, hard working individuals at the Archaeological Museum of Aruba, to preserve the cultural heritage of Aruba, and deserves a round of applause and support from the entire Aruban community benefiting from the fruits of this collaboration.

The cultural identity of the Aruban community, and the place of Aruba among the nations of the world, is best served if its historical roots are well defined, documented, cherished, and conserved by all Arubans.

The Archaeological Museum of Aruba is open for the public from 8-12 AM and from 1-4 PM weekdays and is located behind the Catholic Church in Oranjestad.❑